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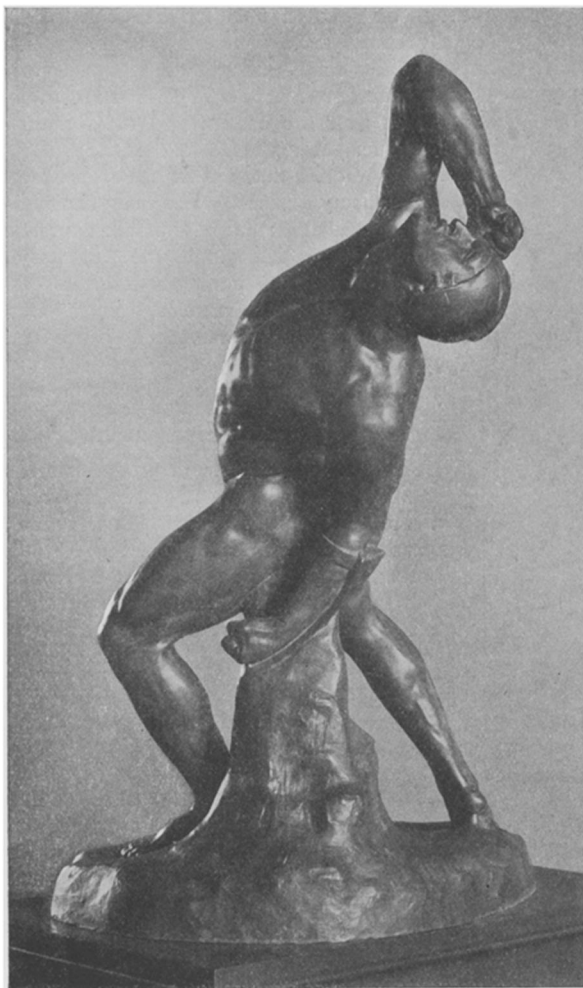
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The Falling Gladiator

Dr. William Rimmer

DR. RIMMER was born in Liverpool in the year 1816. He was the son of a French refugee, who was then holding a commission in the English army, but family and political troubles presently reduced him to absolute poverty, and in 1818 he came to Nova Scotia and then to Boston. Here, under the name of Thomas Rimmer, he supported himself making shoes. It is said that there was nothing that he could not do better than almost anybody else — living as a solitary exile, with hardly any acquaintances, with no interests outside his own house, and no pleasures except what he found in the education and companionship of his children. Then he brought up in the study of literature, nature, science, and art, teaching them to draw and to paint, to dance and to sing, organizing them into a little orchestra, illustrating their lessons in history with his own sketches, and experimenting in electricity and metallurgy, often working at night so that he could make holiday with them next day in the woods and fields. He

seems to have been a man of an excitable temper, of a proud and bitter disposition, disappointed and resentful, but eager and devoted, and of an unquenchable spirit.

This inheritance descended to his son William, in whom, however, a gentler disposition was united with still more varied gifts, which he possessed in still ampler measure. Until he was over forty years of age William Rimmer seems to have led very much the same sort of life, supporting his family by shoe-making, by painting portraits and signs, by working at lithography, by cutting granite, by singing, and at last, after a term of serious study with a friendly physician, as a country doctor. Meanwhile, whether in South Boston, Chelsea, Brockton, Randolph, or Milton, he was constantly exercising his exceptional gifts as a sculptor.

He evinced in them a knowledge of the human figure and a vigor of imagination which seem hardly ever to have been surpassed. He generally cut his work directly in the stone without any model, and without any preparatory studies in clay. Even when working in clay, he was a carver rather than a modeller, cutting away surplus material rather than building up the forms. But of the result of all this activity in all these years hardly anything now remains.

At last, however, in 1861, when Dr. Rimmer was living as a physician near the granite quarries at East Milton, he executed two works which at once brought him to such name and fame as altered the whole tenor of his life. One of these was a granite head, which he called *St. Stephen*, whom, contrary to the tradition of the church, he represented as an old man. The other was a nude figure of a *Gladiator*, wounded and falling. This was begun in clay, then cast and finished in plaster. Both were made without the aid of any model, the *St. Stephen* being cut directly in the granite without even a study in clay.

These came to the knowledge of his neighbor, Mr. Stephen H. Perkins, who called them to the attention of Mr. William M. Hunt, Mr. Lafarge, Mr. Edward C. Cabot, and other artists. Their sympathy and appreciation led Dr. Rimmer at once to open a school for drawing in Boston. The Lowell Institute presently gave him the opportunity to deliver a course of lectures on Artistic Anatomy, which were followed by classes in drawing in Boston, Providence, Milton, Worcester, and in New York. Here he was placed at the head of the Women's School of Design at the Cooper Institute, a post which he occupied for four years.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hunt urged Dr. Rimmer to take part with him in establishing a school of painting and sculpture. Nothing came of this, but when in 1876 the School of Drawing and Painting was opened at the Museum of Fine Arts, Dr. Rimmer

was appointed instructor in Anatomy. His method of teaching was to draw upon a blackboard figures and groups of figures, with illustrative details upon a larger scale, all of which he set his pupils to copy in their drawing-books, while he explained both the anatomical construction and the principles of artistic composition and of action and expression, which they illustrated. A volume of such drawings was published in 1877 under the title of *Artistic Anatomy*. This had been preceded in 1864 by a more elementary treatise on *The Elements of Design*. Both were reprinted in second editions. Although Dr. Rimmer was constantly in the habit

exhausted his strength until his death in 1879. The only considerable work of sculpture which was put into his hands during these eighteen years was the *Statue of Alexander Hamilton* in Boston, which stands near the eastern end of Commonwealth Avenue. It happens thus that the *Falling Gladiator* is the chief and almost the sole witness to his extraordinary abilities. The piety and public spirit of his daughters has now placed a bronze cast of this figure as their gift to the Museum of Fine Arts, the expense of putting it into this permanent and more worthy material having been borne by a number of Dr. Rimmer's friends and pupils.

A duplicate bronze has, at the same time, been purchased by the Metropolitan Museum in New York, at the instance of Mr. Daniel C. French, one of Dr. Brimmer's earliest and most devoted pupils, and now a Trustee of the Museum. Mr. French personally supervised the making of both statues, which were cast at the bronze foundry of Mr. John Williams in New York. In both cases Mr. Williams has declined to accept any remuneration beyond the actual costs of his work. W. R. W.



The Falling Gladiator

of writing out his opinions on whatever subjects interested him, it does not appear that he ever printed anything excepting these two books.

Meanwhile Mr. Perkins had sent the *Falling Gladiator* to be exhibited in Paris and in Florence, where it excited great interest and admiration. But it was refused admission to the Paris *Salon*, the judges maintaining that it was not a work of art, but a cast from the life, since no sculptor in the world was capable of modelling such a figure.

These labors occupied Dr. Rimmer's time and

Notes

THE LOAN EXHIBITION OF BRONZES announced in the last Bulletin opened on March 4 with a private view arranged for the Annual Subscribers to the Museum. The exhibition consists of 216 numbers and includes examples of the work of Byzantine, Gothic, and Renaissance artists, and of modern French, Italian, and American sculptors. Numerous sword ornaments illustrate European methods in problems similar to those which in Japan brought forth the Tsuba now shown in the Japanese Cabinet.

THE EXHIBITION BY THE COPLEY SOCIETY of works of the French School of 1830 includes a sketch of the "Dante and Virgil" by Corot now shown in the Fifth Gallery. The animals which in the picture were contributed by Barye, are in the sketch apparently from the hand of Corot himself.

An example of Diaz, representing Hounds in a Forest, also exhibited in Copley Hall, is in quality associated with the "Descent of the Gypsies," also in the Museum collection and shown in the Fifth Gallery.

MR. OKABE-KAKUYA AND MR. ROKAKU-SHISUI, after four years' service in the repair and study of the collections of metal work and lacquer in the keeping of the Museum, left Boston early in March on their return to Japan. They leave these collections in a condition which insures their permanent preservation.